

Article:	Background Checks for Workers with Children and Vulnerable Adults
Date:	2 August 2011
Source:	Senior Australians News & Research – www.SeniorAU.com.au

The ACT Government has progressed new laws that will establish a comprehensive background checking system for persons working with children and vulnerable adults.

The Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 seeks to establish a regulatory framework for the background checking and risk assessment of people working - or volunteering - with children or vulnerable adults in the ACT.

ACT Minister for Community Services Joy Burch today announced the Government had secured the approval of the Mental Health Coalition ACT and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association ACT, who had previously expressed concerns about how the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Bill 2010 would impact on their employees with "lived experience".

Ms Burch said the new checks, if passed by the Legislative Assembly in October, would be phased in over six years to allow for a smooth transition, and existing workers in the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors would be screened in the final years to allow the sectors sufficient time to prepare for the reforms. This would occur after a review of the scheme in the third year.

All workers and volunteers who work with children will be screened in the first year of the scheme, expected to start next in 2012.

Ms Burch said, "What we have decided after consultation with the community sector is to give an undertaking that existing workers with organisations that provide services to adults with the mental health and alcohol and other drug issues will be checked from the fifth year of operation."

The Community Services Directorate would also be undertaking a final round of community consultation on the Bill over the next five weeks.

In March, Ms Burch announced the establishment of a panel of experts to provide advice to the Commissioner about role-based checks under the new system, adding greater industry knowledge to the decision-making process.

"Throughout the development of the legislation and supporting documents, the ACT Government has continued to consult with stakeholders and their input has been invaluable in helping to shape the current consultation documents.



"We are now asking for stakeholders and the wider community to have their final say on the proposed Risk Assessment Guidelines and, Application Form, Risk Management Assessment Tool, government amendments to the Bill, and the regulations before they are introduced into the Legislative Assembly."

The Bill proposes that checks for employees will incur a small Government-subsidised, tax deductible charge, while volunteers will not be charged. Registrations will be renewed every three years.